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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001862

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SUBJECT: ABDEL AZIZ AL-HAKIM DISCUSSES IRAQI FUTURE WITH
BAHRAIN LEADERSHIP

Classified By: William T. Monroe Reason: 1.4 (B)(D)

11. (C) Summary. SCIRI Chairman Al-Hakim visited Bahrain this week, bringing a positive message of reassurance that Iraqi Shia wished to work with Sunnis to forge a new Iraq. Hegemony of one faction, he insisted, was not a model for Iraq. He said he had talked with many Sunni religious leaders in Ramadi and elsewhere who complained of intimidation by extremists. He accused the media of distortion in suggesting that civil war was developing in Iraq, saying that Sunnis and Shia were much too linked for the country to split apart. He said the terrorists who attacked the consulate in Jeddah had been trained in Iraq and slipped back into Saudi Arabia after Ramadan. King Hamid reiterated to Al-Hakim Bahrain's support for the political process. Bahrain's Minister of Islamic Affairs complained over lunch with Al-Hakim about certain recent actions by Shia Bahrain. End summary.

12. (C) SCIRI Chairman Abdel Aziz Al-Hakim visited Bahrain December 11-12 as part of a tour of the region, meeting the King, Prime Minister, and a wide range of local Shia leaders and scholars. Al-Hakim told the press that the purpose of his visit was to reassure neighboring countries of the positive political role that the Shia would play in the future of Iraq, a message that was reflected in both his public and private comments. In addition to Bahrain, his itinerary also includes the UAE, Kuwait, Syria, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia (twice: first to do Umrah last week, and returning this week to meet Crown Prince Abdullah), according to Iraq's Ambassador to Bahrain Ghassan Hussein.

13. (C) Ambassador Hussein told the Ambassador that the meeting with the King lasted a full 80 minutes, during which the King reiterated Bahrain's full support for the political process in Iraq and its hope for the full participation of all parties in the upcoming elections, including Sunnis. Al-Hakim, for his part, told the King that Iraq cannot develop into a hegemony of one faction over others. There should be a consensus of all factions. The Shia as a majority, he said, cannot impose its will on others. Hakim praised the model of the Governing Council which he felt, although criticized by many, was in fact a reflection of a kind of consensus among many factions. Even the Christian member did not feel that he was just one against 24, but rather one of 24. The decision to head the Governing Council from a rotating panel of nine reflected this desire for consensus. It was, he said, a model for a new Iraq. "We don't want hegemony of one faction," he repeated.

14. (C) Turning to the elections, Al-Hakim cited a recent independent poll in Iraq which indicated that 60 percent of the people in Ramadi are in favor of holding elections. He said that he had met many prominent Sunnis religious scholars from that area who complained of intimidation by extremists who wanted to impose their views on them. He used similar language in describing Falluja, saying the people there had been taken hostage by the extremists who wanted to impose their views. He noted that after the liberation of Falluja, there had been no demonstrations or protests in Iraq, not even in Ramadi. The King joked that even in Bahrain there had been two protest marches against the action in Falluja.

15. (C) Al-Hakim dwelled at some length in his meetings on the distortion of developments in Iraq by the media, which describes the situation as a case of civil war. It is true that Zargawi is calling for a civil war and wants to wage civil war, Al-Hakim stated, but he has failed in this effort. In fact, Iraq is much more complex than a simple Sunni-Shia division that risks succumbing to civil war. It has major tribes (Janahiya, Jabbour, Shamar) that are half Sunni, half Shia. Shia and Sunnis have many links, including through intermarriage. He said that he could not imagine that Iraq could be split apart.

16. (C) According to Ambassador Hussein, Bahrain's recent offer at Sharm Al-Shaykh to host a meeting in Bahrain of moderate political parties was raised in passing during the meeting with the King. Al-Hakim thanked the King for his offer, but did not explore it more deeply.

17. (C) Al-Hakim discussed with the King, and also with the media, the recent attack on the U.S. consulate in Jeddah. Al-Hakim told the King that terrorists in the attack had been trained in Falluja over the previous six months, and had

returned to Saudi Arabia just after Ramadan to launch their attack. He cited this to the press as an example why it was important for Iraq's neighbors to work together for the stability of Iraq. He denied to the press that Iran or Syria were interfering in the election process.

18. (C) Ambassador Hussein said that Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Islamic Affairs Shaykh Abdullah Al-Khalifa invited Al-Hakim for a luncheon on December 12 that was attended by major Shia leaders and ulema in Bahrain, including the leaders of the four opposition Shia groups that boycotted the last election and have remained outside the political process. During the lunch, Shaykh Abdullah had critical words for the Shia in Bahrain. He complained that Shia leaders had recently set up a Religious Scholars Council that in effect rivaled the existing official Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, which falls under Shaykh Abdullah's Ministry of Islamic Affairs. And he complained that Shia picked December 17 to celebrate Martyrs Day, even though that comes at the same time that the country celebrates its National Day/King's Coronation Day. Al-Hakim told Shaykh Abdullah he was not aware of these concerns.

19. (U) Baghdad Minimize considered.
MONROE